

IN THE CLAIMS

Please amend the claims as follows:

1. (Original) A method of printing an image onto a 3-dimensional surface, the method comprising:

heating a transfer element having an image printed thereon to make the transfer element more flexible;

applying the heated transfer element to a 3-dimensional surface having a protective coating thereon, with substantially uniform pressure across the area of contact between the transfer element and the surface, such that the image faces the surface; and

heating the transfer element to at least partially transfer the image into the protective coating.

2. (Original) A method according to claim 1, further comprising the step of applying said protective coating.

3. (Original) A method according to claim 2, further comprising the step of applying a receptor coating prior to application of said protective coating.

4. (Currently Amended) A method according to ~~any one of the preceding claims~~ claim 1, further comprising the step of printing an image onto said transfer element.

5. (Original) A method according to claim 4, wherein the image is printed by means of a digital printer.

6. (Currently Amended) A method according to ~~any one of the preceding claims~~ claim 1, wherein the transfer element is applied to the surface by means of

vacuum forming.

7. (Currently Amended) A method according to ~~any one of the preceding claims-claim 1~~, wherein the transfer element is at least partially heated by means of hot gas.

8. (Currently Amended) A method according to ~~any one of the preceding claims-claim 1~~, further comprising the step of applying a thermally conductive film to the transfer element.

9. (Currently Amended) A method according to ~~any one of the preceding claims-claim 1~~, further comprising the step of removing solvent and/or moisture from a region adjacent said transfer element during heating thereof.

10. (Canceled)

11. (Currently Amended) An apparatus for printing an image onto a 3-dimensional surface, the apparatus comprising:

at least one fixing means-device for fixing a transfer element, having an image printed thereon, in position relative to a 3-dimensional surface on which an image is to be printed and having a protective coating applied thereto;

at least one heating means-device for heating the transfer element to make it more flexible and to at least partially transfer the image into the protective coating;  
and

at least one application means-device for applying the flexible transfer element to the surface with substantially uniform pressure across the area of contact between the transfer element and the surface such that the image faces the surface.

12. (Currently Amended) An apparatus according to claim ~~11~~10, wherein ~~the~~

at least one said ~~the~~ fixing means-device comprises at least one respective recess for receiving at least one part having a respective 3-dimensional surface, and for fixing a respective transfer element relative to the or each said part.

13. (Currently Amended) An apparatus according to claim ~~12~~11, wherein the recess is at least partially removable from a housing of the apparatus, and the corresponding fixing ~~means-device~~ is adapted to fix the transfer element in response to insertion of the recess into the housing.

14. (Currently Amended) An apparatus according to claim ~~13~~12, further comprising at least one further fixing ~~means-device~~, for holding the or each said recess in position in the housing.

15. (Currently Amended) An apparatus according to claim ~~13 or 14~~12, further comprising at least one control ~~means-device~~ for actuating at least one said ~~the~~ heating ~~means-device~~ and/or ~~the~~ at least one said application ~~means-device~~ in response to insertion of the recess into the housing.

16. (Currently Amended) An apparatus according to ~~any one of claims 11 to 15~~ claim 10, wherein ~~the~~ at least one said heating ~~means-device~~ is adapted to direct hot gas towards the surface.

17. (Currently Amended) An apparatus according to ~~any one of claims 11 to 16~~ claim 10, further comprising at least one moisture and/or solvent removing ~~means device~~ for removing solvent and/or moisture from a region adjacent the transfer element.

18. (Currently Amended) An apparatus according to ~~any one of claims 11 to 17~~ claim 10, wherein ~~the~~ at least one said application ~~means-device~~ comprises a respective vacuum forming ~~means-device~~.

19. (Canceled)

20. (Original) A transfer element adapted to have an image printed thereon, the transfer element comprising:

a carrier layer adapted to be heated to make the carrier layer more flexible;

an image supporting layer; and

a thermally conducting layer.

21. (Canceled)